

When Stars Collide (parts 8-14)

by Serendipity

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Summary: When a hacker helps an angel get his soul back, she finds she may lose her heart in the process

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> <meta name="GENERATOR"> When Stars Collide (part8-part14)

>When Stars Collide**

By Serendipity

>(part 8-part 14)

>*****

Around 20 minutes later, the doorbell rang at Angel's apartment.

A solitary figure lying on a pile of black silken sheets groaned.
Maybe they'll just go

>away... > <p>

The bell was followed by insistent knocking.

Maybe not. >

Snarling in irritation, Angel shoved himself up and rolled out of bed to answer the door,

> If these are *more* of Spike's goonies, there is going to be some SERIOUS
bloodletting in-, > He whipped the door open, already in attack stance when he came face >to face with a very startled young girl. <p>

"Willow?" he gasped in surprise.

"Angel?" she backed away fearfully.

Suddenly he realized he must have his game face on. The guilt was enormous as he
>quickly shifted back to his human features. <p>

He felt the anger and power ebb right out of him at the sight of the pretty teenager
>cowering at the other side of the hall, "Yes..yes, Willow, it's Angel. I'm sorry about that.
I apologize."

She let out a sigh of relief.

His shoulders slumped slightly and his gaze glued itself to the floor.

They stood like that for a few more seconds before Willow finally cleared her throat,
>"Well Angel? Aren't you going to invite me in?" she asked firmly.
<p>

His eyes shot back up to her face almost instantly in order to gauge her emotions.

She'd been expecting that reaction and gave him a huge, warm smile.
"I came by to give
>you something and to see how you're doing." <p>

"Oh. Well, yes, of course, come in." Needless to say he was quite a bit surprised that she
>still wanted to be alone behind closed doors with him. He honestly hadn't expected her to
come visit him or to keep checking up on him either.

"You look surprised, didn't you remember that we were supposed to hang out tonight?"
>she demanded once he'd closed the door. <p>

Oh. I completely forgot about that. > "It..ahh..it slipped my mind."

She nodded briskly and began to survey the apartment. The same apartment he'd spent
>all day trashing. <p>

Forgot about that too. >

She turned her steely gaze back to him and he flinched slightly Here it comes..violent
>tendencies and all are out in the open. Here's the part where she leaves. > <p>

"Angel, I'm worried about you," she murmured softly, crossing the room to embrace
>him. <p>

There, she had done it again. She'd managed to catch him completely off guard and
>shock him. <p>

Her demeanor seemed to swing almost as quickly as his. From all at once reprimanding
>and scrutinizing to tender and loving. <p>

"I'm fine, Willow, really," he shifted uncomfortably in her embrace.
It wasn't just that it
>felt strange to be held by the hacker, but it also felt good. And
feeling good wasn't
something that Angel was willing to allow
himself any time soon.

"Don't you...umm...have parents? That is to say..aren't they going to
be worried about
>you? You really shouldn't be here," he hastily broke away from her.
She smelled too
nice.

"My parents are out of town. Perpetually. And I *should* be here. I'm
checking up on a
>friend." <p>

"Willow..." he began in exasperation, "what...happened to your
hair...?" His voice trailed
>off as he suddenly took in her torn corderoys and stained shirt as
well. <p>

She blushed furiously, "I um....I had an accident." She turned away
from him and started
>wandering around the apartment, "Angel, do you have a mirror around
here?" <p>

"Were you attacked?" he felt the energy pulse back into him as he
growled in anger.

She went into the bathroom and he followed her.

"WERE YOU?" he demanded again.

She swiftly shook her head to the negative, "Don't you have a mirror
anywhere in this
>place?" <p>

"Then...??" he asked in total confusion.

"Angel, how on earth do you get by without a mirror?"

"Willow, I don't HAVE A REFLECTION!!" he shouted at her and gripped
her shoulders
>firmly, "What happened to you?" <p>

"I went out a window. Must you pry?????" she yelled back in
exasperation.

His eyes rounded, "Someone threw you out a window?"

"NO, I *jumped* out a window," she explained patiently.

"Oh...what?"

"I-it's a long story," she waved him off immediately, "We can get
into it later."

He shook his head in wonder as she shrugged him off and headed for her backpack.

> Maybe she's on some sort of drug or something.... > <p>

"Angel, have you eaten?"

"No."

"Good, I brought you something to eat."

Right before his eyes she reached into her bag and yanked out two pouches of blood.

"Willow, where did you get those?" Even he could hear the edge of hunger in his voice as

>he eyed the pouches and he hated himself all the more for it.

<p>

"I volunteer at the blood bank. Don't worry about it." She picked up one of them and

>threw it to him, "Drink up." <p>

He looked at the bag and then at her, "Willow, this is human blood. I don't drink human

>blood anymore." He firmly tossed the pouch onto the chair at the other end of the room. <p>

"Angel, you're weak and you haven't eaten, just make an exception this once until you

>can go out hunting on your own again." <p>

"Absolutely not."

She gazed at him silently before surrendering to his will. He was obviously not going to

>back down on this one. <p>

"Fine then. Hey, want to watch some TV?"

"What?" he was thrown by her sudden change of tactics, "Willow, I really appreciate

>what you're trying to d-", <p>

"Oh wow, Angel. You don't even have a TV in here? What do you do all night?"

"Willow, I think you should go hom-,"

"No. I can't go home, Angel. Not now. Not until I spend some time with you."

"Willow-,"

"Will you sit down? Your pacing is making me nervous."

Almost automatically, he sat down at her request before wondering why.

She was more determined than ever to make this visit seem completely

normal. Just two friends, hanging out together on a
>Friday night. Two totally normal pals, chatting it up with a little
bit of take-out from the local blood bank. Hmm... > <p>

"Well, you don't have any mirrors or TVs in here...or a computer. So
what would you
>like to do? Do you have any board games?" <p>

He simply stared at her.

"Guess not....hey, I have an idea, let's have a conversation," she
smiled brightly while sitting on
>the edge of the couch, "You go first." <p>

She looks so cute with her hair like that. Almost like a pixie or an
elf. > Thats when he realized she'd been speaking to

>him...something about a conversation.... Bad idea, "Willow, you know
me,
I'm not much of a conversationalist."

"Well, neither am I."

That's true. > "Okay, what do you want to talk about?" He couldn't
understand why he kept giving in to her. She was
>definitely a major switch from Buffy. She was much more honest and
straightforward. He could tell that she was willing to put

herself on the line for her friends both physically and
emotionally. Which was exactly what she was doing for him.

This was going to take some serious adjustment.

"Anything you'd like, Angel. Life, hobbies, favorite TV shows...if
you had a TV which
>you don't so we can scratch that one...unless of course you used to
watch TV at some
point and had a favorite show from back then and
we could talk about that. You know
>what show I really like that's pretty old? I Love Lucy. It's SO
hysterical. I mean, the
whole 'red-head' factor has nothing to do
with it. That's why Xander thinks I like it. He
>doesn't think it's funny at all. He's really into the Three Stooges,
though, which I
absolutely don't understand because I've watched
it with him and I don't even crack a
>smile while he's on the ground laughing so hard I think I'll have to
administer CPR. In
fact, it's funnier to watch him than to watch
the show. There's a definite difference
>between "girl humor" and "guy humor", I think. Hey did you watch any
cartoons when
you were little? Oh, well, I guess not cause there
weren't TVs when you were little, but I
>used to love cartoons. I'd wake up at 6am and run downstairs to
watch them. They had
some of the coolest cartoons back then, none
of the 'mutant' stuff they have now.
>Have you noticed how EVERYTHING is mutant now? There's even some
show with
mutant bunnies, now that's just twisted. When I was
little, I liked the Smurfs, before they
>time-traveled of course, and Kidd Video, and Poochie , and My Little
Pony, and The
Wuzzles, and She-Ra, which granted was sorta sexist
in hindsight, but at the time I wanted
>to BE her, an-, " <p>

"Okay, Willow, you know what? I *do* want to talk about something,"

Angel chose to

>interrupt her now knowing that if he didn't, she'd be liable to
carry on this one
conversation with herself all night.

Willow smiled internally Note to self. Babbling incessantly makes
Angel talk. >

>Outside, she was all innocence, "Yes?" <p>

"It's...well.." he stood and started pacing again, "It's hard for me
to say."

"Oh, give it a try, it can't be that bad."

"Oh, but it is, trust me it is," he rolled his eyes, "....it's just
that," he suddenly sat down

>right next to her and lowered his voice, "There's this face I just
can't get out of my
head."

"A-a face?"

"Willow, as a...a...a friend," he seemed to have trouble saying the
word and believing it

>at the same time, "can I ask you something?" <p>

"Sure, Angel!" unable to help herself, she leaned forward slightly
and her heartbeat

>picked up just a bit. <p>

"It's pretty important, and I can give you time to think about it,
but I really need an

>answer." <p>

She nodded.

"I feel so stupid asking, and I know this isn't the right thing to
do, but I can't help

>myself." <p>

She nodded sympathetically.

" I mean, I've turned it over in my head a hundred times, and every
time I do it, I can't

>seem to get away from my feelings..." <p>

She nodded again, her heart jumping to her throat.

"But I trust you Willow, I really do. I think I've always trusted you
without even knowing it,"

>he took her hands in his, "And..I don't want you to hate me for
asking you this, especially
because I'd promised myself that I
wouldn't when this whole thing started, but now I
>know that I can't let it go any longer." <p>

"Angel, just ask!" she finally exploded.

"Do you think I have a chance?"

"A-a chance?"

He looked incredibly guilty but forced his gaze to her own, "At

a...at a relationship..."

Willow just about fainted, "A relationship?"

"With Buffy."

"With.....Buffy..oh," she looked down immediately and tried to blink away the

>unexpected tears which flowed into her eyes. Must be dust in her contact lenses again. <p>

"Willow? Please don't be mad at me. I know it's unfair to put you on the spot bu-,"

She looked back up at him, "No. No Angel, it's fine."

Was it his imagination or did her eyes look a bit brighter than they did before?

"I understand your position completely, and I don't hate you at all," she continued,

>forcing herself to smile at him kindly, "I could never hate you, you're one of my closest
friends," she dropped her gaze again and studied the crinkles in the tan leather sofa, "I >can ask Buffy, if you'd like. I think your chances are good though," she raised her eyes
back to his, "Very good. With a little bit of prodding, I'm sure she'll come around...."

> What am I saying? Am I agreeing to help him to win back Buffy? Ohmigosh I am.. > <p>

"Y-you mean, you'll help me to get her back?" he asked in disbelief.

"Yes...I will."

"Thank you Willow," he whispered softly. In a rare show of emotion, he leaned over and

>hugged her. <p>

Falling limply into the embrace, she felt the tears well in her eyes. Wow, it sure

>is dusty in here.... > <p>

Part 9

"So she wasn't there?"

"Well, *someone* was there. I heard the door slam upstairs."

"Any sign of who it might've been?"

"No, by the time I got up there, the room was empty. The window was open, though."

"Xander, it could've just been the wind that slammed the door shut. I think you're >overreacting." <p>

"I don't. Her room was a disaster area. There were clothes and shoes and makeup all over
>the place." <p>

"Makeup?"

"Yeah. It's not at all like her."

"Well, if there was makeup and stuff..maybe we *should* go take a look."

"My point exactly, what if she's possessed or something?"

"I think that both of you are overreacting," Giles broke in, looking up from one of his
>books, "She'll be fine, I saw her running across campus with Amy today. She looked alot
happier than I've seen her in a long time. And I can't believe that you simply violated her
>privacy by barging into her house like that, Xander." <p>

The boy had enough decency to look mildly embarrassed, "Well, I was worried about her.

>She isn't returning my phone calls and Buffy's been emailing her for the past few days and
she hasn't been responding. We barely get to see her anymore. That and the fact that she's hanging out with Amy way too
>much." <p>

"Well, why don't you just call Amy and see what's going on?"

"Don't go there, G-man."

"Oh, please Xander, don't tell me that you're still scared of her after that whole magic
>spell incident." <p>

"No, I'm not 'scared', I'm just-, "

"Petrified out of your mind," Cordelia finished. She was sick of watching them discuss
>this. It was Saturday night, they should be out having fun. "I hate to admit it, but I think
that I'm going with Giles on this one. Willow's fine. In fact, she's probably at the Bronze
>right now, dancing the night away. Let's go check," she grabbed Xander's arm and
started hauling him out of the library.

"I think that's a wonderful idea. Buffy, you ought to go with them. Everyone has been on
>edge lately and a break would do us all some good." <p>

Unable to believe her ears, the slayer simply stared at him, "You're kidding, right? No
>patrols?" <p>

Giles removed his glasses and cleaned them thoughtfully, "No, no patrols for tonight. I
>think that one night off should be alright, especially since everyone has been so stressed.
Vampiric activity has been down recently, and it should be fine as long as you three stay

>together at all times." <p>

"Great, music to my ears. You heard the man, let's go," With that, Cordelia forceably

>yanked both Xander and Buffy towards the library door, "Laters Giles!" <p>

"Goodnight, I'll see you all tomorrow morning at 10:30!"

Swallowing their collective groan, the three teens smiled and waved before dashing out

>the door, into the darkness. <p>

>They were sitting so close that their knees were touching. <p>

She stared at him, her green eyes glittering in an almost predatory manner.

He returned her gaze evenly while making a few wild calculations in his head.

"Don't try to stall, fang-boy," she said in the most intimidating voice she could muster.

"I'm *not* stalling," he replied, trying to sound outraged while he stalled some more.

"Uh huh," she snickered, "Don't even *think* about lying to me. I'm a master at this.

>Now go." <p>

Damn, she's got me. What am I gonna do. >

"NOW," she urged.

"Fine, fine, seven," he replied in exasperation.

She paused a moment.

A HA! Gotcha!! > he thought, doing a little victory dance in his head.

Suddenly, the predatory glitter returned to her eyes and his heart fell.

Uh oh.... >

She threw her head back and laughed heartily.

"Damn," he muttered under his breath.

"Angel?" she asked, grinning smugly and relishing every moment of it.

"Yes?" he responded, pouting slightly.

"Go Fish."

It had been a long past few weeks and as embarrassed as she would have been to admit it, Amy

>Madison had gone to bed on a Saturday night before 10:30. She hadn't been able to help
it. She was downright exhausted. Between preventing homicidal vampires from killing

>her friends, early morning phone calls which forced her out of bed and using her powers
to conjure up different outfits, she'd been pretty busy.

Hence, she'd fallen asleep almost the instant her head hit the pillow. And now she

>couldn't wait to wake up. <p>

The frequency of her visions has increased, and these were definately worse. They were still a bit foggy..not quite as vivid as
>the one she'd had the night Angelus was chasing Willow, but they were just as bad, especially since she didn't know what to
make of them.

>
It was the same over and over again. These long metal poles of some kind coming down,
>beating fiercely, next there was shouting, and finally lots of blood. The scene then shifted
to a broken body, face obscured by shadows, lying out on cold cement. Finally, the
>sequence ended with a glimpse of a hill and a brilliant flash of sunlight. Again and
again and again, the images and sounds paraded through her head. Always in the same
>order, always the same spacing, always the same length. She never got more information
or insight than these few snippets.

Finally clawing her way to consciousness on what must have been the fifth time through, she sat up in bed, her body covered by
>a cold sweat. <p>

She moaned softly and looked at her alarm clock.

10:47.

It was going to be a long night.

>Giles had his jacket on and was halfway to the door before he remembered his umbrella. <p>

Sighing softly, he returned to his office, but couldn't find it. Finally, after an additional 10

>minutes of searching, he located it under one of the large library tables.
 Xander and his fooling about.... >

Grumbling under his breath he tried to get it by reaching one arm under, but it was too far. Finally,

>he simply gave up and crawled under the table. Grabbing the umbrella, he started to back
out, but paused when he saw a book underneath as well. "I am going to have to discuss
>proper library etiquette with all three of them," he muttered, reaching for it. <p>

As he pulled it away, he was somewhat surprised to find tiny fragments of rope behind it.

> Now that's odd...we really need to clean more thoroughly. People could start asking
questions. >

After getting out from under the table, he picked up his umbrella and turned to throw the

>book into the "return" bin. He'd take care of it tomorrow morning.

The cover of the
book, however, gave him pause. "Scripts and Ancient Curses," he read aloud. Frowning

>slightly, he noticed that a few of the pages had been marked.

Casually flipping through
the chosen passages, his frown deepened, "Oh my."

His panic rapidly increasing, he dropped the book on the counter.

With shaking hands he picked up the phone...

Part 10

It was nearly 3am when a very bleary-eyed Willow finally returned home. "I am going *straight* to bed," she mumbled to >herself after she'd locked the door and waved goodnight to Angel. The time they'd spent together had been marvelous. They'd
really just hung out and talked for the first few hours but once he'd found a deck of cards in his closet, things had really started

>swinging. She'd beat him in three straight hands of Go Fish and five of Hearts. He was a bit put out at first and even went so far
as to call her a card shark so she let him win the last two games of Hearts. It was bonding. Bonding was good. She felt bonded >and now she was exhausted. <p>

Passing through the living room, she noticed the answering machine blinking.

Wow, 7 messages, I sure am popular tonight. >

The first three were from her parents. Alternately it went, Mom, Dad, Mom. She'd have to remember to call them. The next >three were from Xander. She'd have to call him back too at some point. She stretched tiredly and flopped back onto the couch
to listen to the last one:

Beeeepâ€|

After I hear this one, I'm going straight to bed. >

"Willow? Th-this is Gilesâ€|"

The hacker grinned to herself, I can't believe Xander got Giles to call me tooâ€| >

"I-I've discovered some ratherâ€|disturbing news and we're all at the library right now and..It would be a good idea if you >came by as wellâ€|It's approximately 2:45am right now and I've sent Buffy over to get you. This is extremely important,
Willow, and I look forward to hearing from you soon."

Click

This caused her to sit straight up. 2:45am? Well then, Buffy should be here rightâ€| >

As if on cue, the doorbell rang.

â€|now >
>

He walked casually down the street, hands in his pockets, humming softly under his breath. It had been a pretty interesting
>nights. It seemed that the more he got to know her, the more he was surprised by the outwardly meek and quiet Willow
Rosenberg. She was an unending series of contradictions. Physically fragile, she was mentally strong and quick. She was sweet
>and sincere but also knew when to be firm and hard-headed. Like that night he was going to kill himself. He frowned slightly. If
she hadn't stopped himâ€|he shook his head. I owe a lot to her. I owe her my life two times over. Probably even more. >
>She also had a very strange and unintentional way of making him laugh. He was growing to like her distinct sense of humor
almost as quickly as he was growing to like her. Certainly, he'd gotten along with her before. He'd even come to her for help
>on occasion. But he'd never really gotten to *know* her. Not like he did now. Now, he was just beginning to see the spark
and the life which lay just under the shy exterior. The "real" Willow Rosenberg.

Yes, this night had only strengthened his opinion of her. In fact, he couldn't remember a time when he'd been so at ease with
>another person. He couldn't help but grin at the memory of Willow trying to inconspicuously let him win at cards. She has a
good heart. > he suddenly realized. And above all, that was the one thing Angel respected about the red haired hacker. For
>someone who had lived on the Hellmouth for so long and had dealt with so many hardships at such a young age, it truly amazed
him that she was able to remain as innocent and kind as she had.

Whistling, he started to turn a corner and that's when he felt it. An odd tingling sensation which was faint at first and then seized
>his entire being. Buffyâ€| > He could sense her. She was coming towards him at a very quick speed. Swiftly stepping
backwards into the shrubbery, Angel melted into the shadows in the way which only he could. He watched almost longingly as
>she ran past him. She was close enough to touch. His heart ached silently as he caught a faint whiff of her perfume. Vanilla.
<p>

Sighing softly, he watched her run in the direction he'd just come from. Next, she took a turn down Willow's street. Frowning,
>he waited. Within a few minutes, both Buffy and Willow emerged walking hurriedly. He caught pieces of their conversation as
they flew past him.

"So Giles hasn't said anything to you?"

"Nope, he wanted you to be there before he explained what this was all about. He seems pretty freaked out though. Do you >have any ideas about what might be going on?" <p>

"Ummâ€|no?"

By then, they'd moved so far that he couldn't hear anymore. Growling, he started to follow them. I wonder what's >happening? >

"Buffyâ€|Willow. Good," The librarian looked at both girls and nodded briskly.

Cordelia moaned softly, half asleep and sat up from her previous position of leaning against Xander, "Thank God for small >favors. It took you people long enough. Do you know what lack of sleep does to a person? Dark circles right under the eyes.
Very unattractive."

"Okay Giles, so what's up?" Buffy asked, pointedly ignoring Cordelia and taking a seat at the end of the table. Willow chose to >stand, rather nervously, near the door. <p>

"W-well, I was doing a bit of cleaning around here and I found some things which wereâ€|disturbing. Then I did some more >cleaning and I found some more things..which
were just as disturbing."

Willow felt her heart begin to sink as a very unsettled feeling invaded the pit of her stomach.

"It started with this book," he held up the offending object for the rest of the group to see.

Uh oh. > Willow recognized it almost immediately and could feel the guilty flush start to creep up her neck. I thought I put >that away. > <p>

"And then I found some odd scraps of rope and other books which had been mislaid," Giles continued, "As well as this." He >held up a piece of crumpled paper. <p>

I knew I should have shredded that. > she kicked herself mentally.

"Okay Sherlock, so what's the deal?" Cordelia demanded, "What's on the paper?"

"If I'm not mistaken, this paper is a computer print-out of a restoration spell."

At the mention of the word "computer" all eyes turned to Willow. She fidgeted uncomfortably, fiddling with the bottom of her >blouse. <p>

"A restoration spell? As inâ€|to restore a person's soul?" Buffy whispered softly.

"Willow," Giles asked, a serious look in his dark eyes, "Were you planning on using this?"

The library fell silent as everyone waited for an answer.

She shifted, "Wellâ€|not exactlyâ€|"

"Willow, do you now how dangerous this is? If you had found the spell, you should have come to me first. It's extremely powerful and you don't have the experience or the training to carry out something like this on your own. It's a good thing I
caught this in time. We need to thoroughly explore our options. I'm not so sure that using the spell at this point is a good idea."

"Can I see it?" Buffy asked numbly as she took it from his hands.

"It could be outdated for all we know or it could even backfire."

Xander nodded vigorously, "Yup, spells can backfire. It really sucks when that happens. Besides, it's not right to change him back now. Not after he killed Ms. Calendar. I mean, how do we know that it won't happen again? How do we know he won't
get happy and then go nuts and start killing people? The guy is dangerous, Willow."

"Well, the restoration is actually designed to *permanently* anchor the soul," she began.

"But we don't know if it would even work in the first place," Giles cut in, "You also have to realize that Angelus would most likely attack once he realized what was going on. If we ultimately failed, we'd have a very dangerous, antagonized vampire on
our hands," he shook his head, "No, this is entirely out of the question."

"B-Butâ€|"

"Willow, it was a good idea," Buffy looked up sadly from the piece of paper she was holding, "but I'm afraid Giles is right. I've given up on ever getting Angel back the way he was. I think this is for the best. If we tried to restore his soul, it would just
complicate things more."

"Y-you don't understand," the red-head stammered, tears starting to fill her eyes.

"Don't understand what?" Giles asked, slightly confused, "My God, Willowâ€|you didn't actually attempt this already did you?" he stared at her in shock. <p>

"No, it's not just that I attempted itâ€|," she replied, her voice sounded pained and hoarse.

"She was successful," said a voice from the door.

Part 11

From the instant Angel stepped into the library, Willow's world started moving in slow motion.

First there was the collective gasp from her friends. Then there was the look of complete shock on their faces. Finally, the >shouting began. <p>

"Angel?" Buffy cried.

"Oh my God." Cordelia yelped, hiding behind Xander. He jumped up and started moving away from the table.

"How could you? Are you insane?" Willow started slightly when she realized that the question was directed at her.

"X-Xander, pleaseâ€|"

"NO, I can't believe you'd do this!! How could you do this to everyone, Willow?" The intense look of utter betrayal in his eyes

>was worse than anything she could have ever imagined. <p>

Giles stared blankly at the whole scene before silently stalking off into his office.

"Xander, I didn-, "

"I can never trust you again," he hissed through clenched teeth, angrier than she'd ever seen him.

Unable to stand it, Willow looked past him, to where Angel had walked over to Buffy and was talking to her in a muted voice.

>The slayer looked to be near tears and was shaking her head slowly. He reached out to touch her arm and she flinched away
from him.

"I can't believe you brought that bastard back in here," Xander growled, drawing her attention back to him, "How dare you??>How dare you endanger ALL of us? How dare youâ€|disgrace Ms. Calendar's memory like this?" <p>

"Xanderâ€|" she choked out, trying to get away from him.

He took ahold of her arm harshly, "Willow, I can't BEL-, "

"Xander! Stop!!" Cordelia insisted, grabbing him and trying to pull him away.

"Get the bloody hell out of my way," Giles bellowed, coming out of his office with a crossbow in hand.

That's when the real pandimonium broke loose.

Cordelia stopped struggling with Xander almost instantly and looked up in horror.

Angel paled slightly but didn't say anything as Giles roughly grabbed Buffy and shoved her away. He lifted the crossbow and >aimed it directly at the vampire's heart. <p>

"No!" Willow screamed, breaking away from Xander, and rushing to scramble over the table.

"Willow," Xander flew after her, grabbing her ankle just as she launched herself upwards.

"You killed her, you bastard, you killed the only woman I ever loved and you deserve to die for it," Giles snarled, a dull and icy

>look in his eyes as his fingers gripped the trigger. <p>

Angel made no attempt to move.

Buffy sat a few feet away, stunned.

Cordelia quickly regained her senses and ran over to where Willow and Xander were still fighting.

"I'm sending you to hell."

With a vicious kick to the mouth, Willow forced Xander to drop her foot and launched him tumbling backwards into Cordy.

>Crawling on her hands and knees, she crossed the table and shot off the other side, falling face first. Her arms reached out and
encircled Angel's waist, pulling them down together.

As they spiraled downwards, Willow heard a faint wooshing noise just as the arrow flew past, nicking the side of her face. She >landed heavily on his chest. <p>

Shaking, she sat up and lightly touched the cut the arrow's near miss had made, just under her eye.

"Willow, get out of the bloody way," Giles ground out, his voice barely recognizable to her ears.

She looked up to see him standing over them. Breathing hard and perspiring profusely, he was reloading the crossbow without

>taking his gaze off of the pair below. His eyes were vacant yet wild. He looked almost as if he'd lost his mind. <p>

"No," she whispered defiantly.

He held up the crossbow, "I said get out of my way."

She stood up, suddenly getting very angry herself, "I said, NO goddammit."

The librarian faltered slightly.

"Put that thing down," she demanded, "Before you hurt someone."

"Willow, get out of the way. I'm not going to ask you again," he was almost pleading.

"If you want to kill him, you'll have to kill me first," she said softly, deliberately walking directly up to the tip of the arrow, "Put

>the crossbow DOWN, Giles. You don't know what you're doing. Please."
<p>

There was a moment when she was sure her heart stopped beating. One brief moment when she thought he might actually
>shoot through her to get to the vampire below. Luckily, he didn't.
<p>

With a look of bitter sorrow and grief, Giles slowly lowered the weapon.

Willow let out the breath she hadn't even known she'd been holding. Over his shoulder, she saw Buffy starting to walk towards
>them. She looked on as a very shaken Cordelia helped up Xander who was nursing his injured jaw. <p>

"Giles, I-I'm so sorry-", she moved towards him shakily, suddenly switching from an angry, stubborn fighter back to a
>frightened sixteen year old. <p>

He shook his head and drew away from her, "Get out," he whispered.

"What?" she asked, not quite comprehending.

He turned his full attention to his young protÃ©gÃ©,
"Get..the..bloody hellâ€|OUT OF MY LIBRARY," he shouted at her, his face
>contorted in fury. <p>

She gasped and paled slightly, her chin starting to tremble. Backing away, she felt the tears springing into her eyes again. She

>turned and bumped into Angel who had, at some point during the confrontation, gotten up to stand behind her. She pushed past
him blindly and ran out the doors, top speed. Dead silence fell throughout the room and they could hear her sobbing loudly
>down the hall. <p>

Wordlessly, Angel turned and ran after her.

Part 12

She was a streak of red, sobbing hysterically, running down the empty streets of Sunnydale like a train out of control. She ran
>hard and fast, unseeing and uncaring.
For all she knew she was the only person left in the world. Nothing mattered anymore.

It took him almost three blocks to catch up with her.

Once he got close enough to see her, he took to calling out her name, but to no avail. She either didn't hear him or chose not to

>respond. He picked up the pace, straining slightly but determined to catch her. <p>

Finally, just as she turned down the corner of her own street, he managed to snag one of her suspenders and drag her to a halt.

>Barely stopping to even catch her breath, she jumped right into his arms like a lost kitten, wrapping her legs around his waist,
her arms around his neck and whimpering softly. Two weeks ago, this type of behavior would have made him uncomfortable.

>Heck, two hours ago it would have made him uncomfortable. Not now. No, now all had changed. He had grown used to this,
used to her.

And so, he stood there, stroking her hair and offering silent support until she was finally able to speak. Briefly, he considered

>carrying her home, but before he could, she slowly lowered her legs and slid to the ground on her own accord, still leaning
weakly against him.

"They hate me, all of them. Not that I blame them," she whispered dully.

"No, they don't hate you, Willow. They hate me. They're just surprised and confused right now, that's all. They'll get over it.

>No one could ever hate you." <p>

"I've never seen Giles so mad," her voice sounded strained as she started walking towards her house. He followed closely >behind, just in case. <p>

"You saved my life. Again," he gently reminded her, "It was very brave of you."

"I kicked Xander in the head. Oh My GOD. I kicked my best friend in the head."

He soon grew to realize that she really wasn't paying attention to what he was saying.

>Knowing her extremely sensitive nature, the events of this night must have been an almost unbearable blow for her. Her
friendships, though few, meant the world to her.

>And tonight, her world had shattered. <p>

They slowly walked up the steps to her house, "And Cordelia..I think I knocked Xander into her..I hope she didn't get hurt >too. I saw her standing up, so I-I don't think she broke anything," her voice cracked slightly as she blindly unlocked the door,
her eyes filling with tears again.

"Willow," he placed a firm hand on her shoulder, "They'll snap out of it. I promise you.

>Xander wasn't badly hurt and I saw Cordelia. She was a bit shaken up, but that was it. I can guarantee you that Giles feels
guilty about everything already."

She stepped into the house before turning to face him, "He kicked me out of the library, Angel. I never thought that he'd ever >kick me out of there." The library had always been a haven for Willow. A private, safe place she could always run to whenever
she was in trouble or in need of advice. Being exiled from there was like simply throwing her out undefended into the middle of

>the Hellmouth. <p>

"I know he did, Willow, but I'm sure he regrets it. He was just mad at me and you were in the way," pausing, Angel recalled

>the way she'd stood directly in front of him, unmoving, her slight frame creating an impenetrable shield between himself and
death.

"W-what you did back there," she stared at him, unwaveringly, her green eyes still filled with tears, "It was very brave, Willow,

>but it was also foolish. I never want you to put yourself in harms way because of me, do you understand that?" He hadn't
meant for his words to come out sounding so harsh, but he was truly scared that she'd get herself into trouble because of him
>some day. <p>

"I can't make that promise, Angel. You know that," she gave him a tiny, sad smile,

>"It's just the price of friendship, I guess. You're stuck with me." <p>

He closed his eyes and she could almost sense him blocking her out emotionally. By the time he looked back at her again, his

>features were completely neutral, "Get some sleep, Willow. By tomorrow morning, everything will be fine." <p>

She nodded wordlessly and searched his eyes carefully for something, anything which would indicate his thoughts and feelings.

"Goodnight, Willow."

There it was.

A faint *something* she picked up on which told her that she'd never see him again.

She knew he'd never kill himself as he'd tried to do that night she'd changed him back, but what he could and would do is
>leave Sunnydale. He could very easily disappear into the night without a trace and never come back if he felt it was the 'right'
thing to do.

He turned and started walking away, heading towards the steps of the porch without turning back.

And suddenly in one brief, blinding moment, everything made sense. The world and all the universe be damned, if there was
>one thing Willow Rosenberg had ever been sure of in her life, this was it. <p>

She wasn't going to let him.

"Angel," she said.

He heard the fire in her voice long before he saw it in her eyes.

She reached out and caught ahold of his hand. Reluctantly, he turned back to face her.

In an almost symbolic gesture, she held up his hand, entwining her fingers in his and brought it to the threshold, "Angel," she

>repeated, this time more softly. <p>

He felt a lump growing in his throat.

Staring at him, almost directly into him, with her thoughtful green eyes, she spoke the words which broke his heart and >restructured his life all over again, "Angel, I invite you to enter my home." <p>

And with that, the floodgates, quite literally, broke.

The invisible shield which had been both physically and emotionally separating them vanished in a flash and for what would be >the second time in two weeks, Willow Rosenberg would be there to witness what used to be a very rare event. <p>

Angel crying.

Stepping into the house, with one swift motion he lifted her up high and crushed her to him, hugging her fiercely. She shared in >his tears. <p>

"You're always welcome here, Angel. Always and forever, no matter what," she murmured into his neck.

He just held onto her for what seemed like an eternity in itself.

After several moments, Willow started fidgeting, "Angel? As much as I like you, I can't breathe."

Pulling away, he grinned at her. They were almost nose to nose and he watched as she blushed slightly, "Sorry," he whispered >and lowered her to the floor. <p>

There was an embarrassed pause as he wiped the tears from his own eyes before reaching out to do the same for her.

"Why don't you, ahhh, stay for a few hours?" she asked, sniffling hopefully up at him, "I don't think I'll be sleeping any time

>soon and I'd really appreciate the company." <p>

Angel just smiled, "I think I'd like that. A lot." She was right. This was the price of friendship, and it was one he was more than

>willing to pay. He was, for all practical purposes, stuck with her. <p>

And he couldn't have been happier about it.

The library was dead silent for several minutes after Willow and Angel's exit.

The silence was finally broken by the soft sobbing of Buffy as she placed her hand on Giles arm.

The sound broke the Watcher out of his trance and suddenly the memories and events of the last few minutes came rushing back. With an immense sense of regret, he recalled what he'd last said to the recently departed teenager. Did I really just
kick her out of here? Was I honestly that cruel? > Dropping the crossbow limply to the floor, he knew that he'd have to call her up immediately, go over to her house if need be, in order to make amends. First things first, though, he'd have to deal with the
current damage, both physical and emotional in the library itself.

Turning, he cradled the Slayer as she wept brokenly and buried her face in his shirt.

>He looked past her to Cordelia and Xander. The dark haired girl had slowly started picking up some of the scattered books
and papers which had fallen to the floor when Willow had leapt across the table. Xander was just staring at an invisible spot on >the floor, a slightly stunned look on his face while his hand covered half his jaw. It was already turning a nasty bluish color.

<p>

"Xander, are you alright?" Giles asked hoarsely.

"She kicked me," he answered in a mechanical voice, mumbling slightly so he didn't move his mouth too much.

"Is anything broken? Shall I take you to a hospital?"

"She kicked me," he repeated.

Gently extracting himself from Buffy's embrace, he moved to the boy and started examining the injury.

"It doesn't look too bad, but I still think we should get it X-rayed."

"Was it really him?" Buffy whispered softly, "Is he really back?"

"So it appears," Giles replied, careful this time to keep his personal emotions out of things.

Cordelia walked over to stand next to them, having finished picking up most of the mess.

"Come on, Xander, let's get you to the hospital," Giles gently took ahold of the boy's sleeve and started to guide him towards >the door. <p>

"She kicked me and then sh-she went of with him," he muttered, still in disbelief.

"Yes, she did," Cordelia burst out finally, unable to stand it

anymore, "she did and you beyond deserved it."

"What?" Xander asked in mild shock.

"Willow kicked you and you deserved it. You heard what I said," she stared at him, her eyes snapping dangerously, "I have >never seen anyone be so completely selfish, callous and..andâ€|JEALOUS in my entire life, Xander Harris. She's Willow for
pete's sake and you completely tore her apart. I canNOT believe some of the things you said to her. You used her relationship

>with Ms. Calendar against her just because you were mad that she went ahead and did something without you. That she chose
someone over you. You're not fooling anyone." With that, she walked past all three of them and slammed out the door.

"She's nuts," Xander spat painfully.

"But she's right," Buffy sighed softly, "We all handled that very badly. Poor Willow. Things like this always seem to happen to

>her. I'm going over to check up on her once we get you to the hospital, Xander. Afterwards, I suggest you go talk to Cordy."

> <p>

They had spent the last three hours talking. Again.

At first, she'd grilled him about his conversation with Buffy. In classic Willow style, she shoved her own problems out of the >way in order to help him with his. All things taken together, she honestly felt that the Slayer couldn't be away from him for too
long while knowing that he'd been changed back. She was a firm believer that Buffy would come to her senses and seek Angel >out sooner or later. <p>

Once they got past the events of the night, they got to talking about their respective childhoods and Willow learned some more >about Angel's past. She cherished and treasured each and every anecdote and story he told her. Her eyes glittered when one
ended and she laughed and urged him to tell her another. Feeling him starting to truly open up to her, she knew how precious >and rare this was for him and she was grateful for every second of it. <p>

He, in turn, relished in hearing about her normal, if somewhat sheltered childhood. He took joy in her enthusiasm as she related

>the scores of embarrassing stories she had concerning Xander as well as the many adventures they'd had when they were
younger. > She loves him so much. > Angel realized with a vague tinge of anger That boy is so stupid and blind. > If he'd ever had a
chance at love as beautiful and innocent and complete as that, he'd hold onto it and never let it go. Xander's a foolish

>teenager. > What the boy obviously saw as a gawky and slightly awkward sisterly figure, would in fact be a tall, graceful,
gorgeous young woman in a matter of a few years. Angel had seen it happen several times before. It wouldn't be until then >when Xander would come to his senses, and at that point, Willow will

have moved on. Well, it's his loss, the idiot, if he can't
see how perfect she isâ€| > He turned his attention back to her animated gesturing and realized that she'd moved on to yet >another story. Something about how, in fifth grade, she and Xander had taken to competing in "funny face making contests".
She was in the process of demonstrating, actually when he'd switched back to fully paying attention and he burst out laughing at >her crossed eyes and stuck out tongue. She looked mildly embarrassed until he suddenly mirrored her face and she joined in,
erupting into a fit of giggles herself.

It was nearly five am when the threat of daybreak finally forced Angel to leave.

She walked him to the door and leaned against the frame while smiling up at him, "This was fun, Angel, thank you for this.
>Thank you for being there when no one else was." <p>

He could tell that she honestly meant it and he simply smiled back at her, "I could say the same exact thing to you."

"Hey, Angel, how come you never dance? Fast dance, I meanâ€|" she asked suddenly.

He chuckled softly. Her mind was still quite an enigma to him. He didn't quite understand just where her random questions >came from or how they were connected in her head but by now he'd grown used to her ability to surprise him. Besides, he
didn't mind answering them nearly as much anymore.

Thinking about it for a few moments, he shrugged carelessly, "I honestly don't know. I just haven't in a fairly long time and I >guess that recently, I haven't really felt like it." <p>

She nodded at him seriously, "Well you know, you should. Dancing is good for the soul."

He shook his head good-naturedly and started walking down the porch. She waved goodbye and watched him go until he >stopped suddenly on the steps and turned to her. <p>

"Hey, Willow.."

"Yes?"

He looked slightly thoughtful before smiling at her again, "You know, you have a beautiful soul."

And with that, he walked away, humming softly to himself before finally disappearing from her view.

Part 14

She sat listlessly on the couch in the darkened room, watching reruns of Forever Knight.
> How pathetic am I? > Moaning softly, she reached over for the remote and flipped
through a few more channels before flicking

the TV off and closing her eyes.

The past three days had gone a lot better than she could ever have hoped, and yet, she was still inexplicably depressed. Giles >had called her less than five minutes after Angel left that day. He rather awkwardly apologized for his behavior and informed
her that Xander's jaw, though it would be bruised and sore for several days, was not, in fact, broken. This piece of news was >beyond joyful for Willow who'd been truly scared that she'd done actual damage to him. <p>

Next came a visit from Buffy who spent several hours simply talking with Willow about Angel and how he felt and trying to sort >out how she felt and the entire relationship mess. It was almost like old times. <p>

After her conversation with Buffy, Willow had crawled upstairs and into her bed and had almost literally passed out, not to >awaken until early evening. She missed saying goodbye to Amy who would be gone to Canada for two or three days and she
regretted that but she sorely needed to catch up on sleep.

She'd spent the rest of that night alone, since Buffy went over to visit Angel and they'd "talked". Judging from the brief phone

>conversation she'd had with him and the email she got from Buffy, she knew that they were patching up their relationship
slowly, but surely.

Lastly, came the dreaded conversation with Xander, which hadn't really taken place until a few hours ago. He was fairly quiet

>throughout and she wasn't sure whether or not it was because of her or because his jaw still hurt but something told her that all
had not quite been forgiven. She knew him well and from the tone of his voice she could tell that he was still deeply hurt and felt

>betrayed by what she'd done. Well, he'll just have to deal > she thought, inexplicably annoyed and frustrated with herself.
Why the heck am I in such a bad mood? Life couldn't have been any betterâ€|Xander wasn't injured, Giles forgave me, and >Buffy and Angel were back togetherâ€|everything is back to normal. Then why do I feel so disgusted? > <p>

Sighing, she rose and walked upstairs only to flop down again on her bed.

"Oh gross," she muttered under breath as she stared at her reflection in the mirror across the room. Lack of sleep had caused >dark circles to form around her eyes. With her pale complexion, she looked as if she had two huge bruises on her face. The
injury she'd sustained from the arrow in the library stood out badly as well. It was relatively small, but somewhat painful when >she blinked. She still hadn't figured out exactly how she was going to explain it to her parents. <p>

Standing, she scrutinized her full body, "Ew. I'm all arms and legs an-and this teeny-weeny head. I look like a spider or >something." Her long red locks drooped lifelessly at her shoulders. "Look at me. Bad hair. Bad clothes. Badâ€|everything." She

flopped backwards onto her bed in frustration, "I am the ugliest human being alive."

The phone rang, interrupting her thoughts. Growling and muttering under her breath, she reached for it Maybe it's Xander >wanting to go for round twoâ€| > <p>

"Hello?" she asked dully.

"Willow? It's Cordelia."

"Chase?"

"Umm..yes."

The hacker's green eyes widened slightly as she sat up and tugged the phone closer to her ear, "Cordelia? Is something wrong? >Is Xander okay?" she demanded. <p>

"Who? What? Xander? Yes, of course Xander's okay. No, this has nothing to do with Xander."

She relaxed a bit, "Ohâ€|okay."

"I was just calling to seeâ€|ahhâ€|how you were doing."

Who are you and what have you done with Cordelia Chase? > "Wow, well, I'm doing just fine now. I talked to Xander and >to Buffy and to Xander and they're all okay, which was a big relief. I-it was very thoughtful of you to call." <p>

"Actually, I also wanted to ask you something."

A ha. Ulterior motive. I should have known. > "Really?"

"Yes."

"Okay, go ahead."

"I was wondering if you'd like to...ummâ€|sleep over my house tomorrow night."

Willow almost dropped the phone, "W-what?"

"I mean, as long as you're not busy or anything," the other girl rushed on sounding somewhat embarrassed, "I'm only asking >because I know that your parents are out of town. It's really gotta suck to be all by yourself in your house, especially
considering everything that's happened."

Could it be possible that Cordelia Chase actually has a conscience? Nah. >

>"W-well, it was very nice of you to ask, Cordelia, but I think I'll manage by myself." <p>

"Oh."

Was it her imagination or did the other girl actually sound disappointed? "I also wouldn't want to impose on you or anyth-, "

"You wouldn't be imposing at all. Actually, I was kinda looking forward to umâ€|I dunno, getting to know you a little better I
>guessâ€|. " <p>

This time, Willow did drop the phone.

Scrambling to pick it up quickly she managed to entangle herself in the cord, "Get t-to know me?"

"Well, yeah. I mean, it looks like we have a lot in common."

"Like?" the redhead challenged skeptically, trying to disengage the plastic wire from around her ankle.

There was silence as Cordelia thought about the question, "Xander."

Willow paused. Good point. > "That's true."

"So, you in?" she was growing tired of this game.

"I guess so." The hacker agreed reluctantly.

"Coolness, I'll see you then."

"Great."

"Laters," Cordelia replied shortly before hanging up.

Willow simply stared at the phone in her head. Just when I thought life couldn't get any
>weirderâ€| > <p>

He felt guilty.

There was a shocker.

Angel rolled over on his bed to stare at the ceiling. The shades were firmly pulled throughout the apartment making it almost

>pitch-black. <p>

Buffy had come over to talk to him yesterday morning, just like Willow promised.

>In fact, he had a sneaking suspicion that Willow had a lot to do with her visit. The slayer had even come back at night after her
patrols. Yes, he was really starting to patch things up with Buffy and yet he still felt this gnawing guilt which couldn't really be
>attributed to anything in particular. He realized, with an odd pang of emptiness, that he hadn't seen Willow for the past few
days. At least not since the morning she'd invited him in. He should really call her to see how she was doing.

But he couldn't.

Every time he tried to pick up the phone to call her or went to his door to go visit her, or even thought about her, he felt

>instantly guilty. Almost as if he were being unfaithful somehow.
<p>

It didn't make any sense at all.

Granted she was brilliant, honest, sincere, funny, strong and comfortable to be around. And yes, she was also generous, tender,

>sweet, innocent and kind. Of course even he had to admit that she was prettyâ€|well, beautiful was probably more accurate,

especially when she smiled.

Remembering her bright and sometimes mischievous smiles, Angel soon found himself grinning. The instant he became
>conscious of it, of course, he stopped. <p>

And while it was true that she'd risked her own life to save his on at least three separate occasions, there wasn't any chance in

>hell that he had actual feelings for her.
No, Willow was a pal, a confidant, a friend. That was it. He cherished her companionship more than anyone else's. There was
>no way what he was feeling was anything beyond
simple friendship. With Buffyâ€|well, it was pretty different. Extremely different, in fact. From the instant he'd set eyes on the

>stunning blonde slayer, he'd fallen head over heels for her. Love at first sight, that's what that had been. The first times their

eyes had met, the first time she'd ever touched himâ€|it had set his whole body on fire.

With Willow, it wasn't like that. It was completely the opposite. The situation was very simple. He had been in trouble and
>she'd stepped in. He was grateful that's all. <p>

Exactly.

Just friendship and companionship, nothing more.

Yes.

She was merely a confidant. Someone to turn to when things weren't going too well.

Absolutely.

Hmmmmâ€|.

This could be a problem.

Feeling a slight prickling sensation at the bottom of his spine, Angel turned his attention to the door seconds before someone

>started banging on it. <p>

"Coming," he called, pausing to pull a shirt on over his head. Maybe

it's Willow! >

Pushing a few articles of clothing under his bed and absently tiding up the apartment, he made his way towards the door.

>Quickly, he whipped it open. <p>

"Oh, Buffy."

Abruptly suppressing the automatic flash of disappointment, he held the door open a bit wider, "Shouldn't you be on patrol or

>something?" <p>

"Yeah, well, hi to you too," she replied, obviously agitated and clutching her neck.

"Is everything ok-??" he began as she roughly pushed past him and headed into his apartment.

"Okay? Well, no, not really," she called over her shoulder before entering the bathroom and slamming the door shut behind her.

"Buffy?" he followed her curiously, "Buffy what's going on?"

There were several seconds of silence as he stood by the locked door and listened to the water running from within.

Finally, the blonde slayer emerged with a white bandage around the left side of her delicate throat.

Angel's eyes widened, "Are you alright???"

The slayer snickered slightly to herself before taking a seat on the sofa, "As 'alright' as you can be after being bitten by a

>vampire." <p>

Coming Soon...Parts 15-22

End
file.